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THE GHOST OF THE HOUSE

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825 Some of our people believe in what they call *Il Hâres*—and some of our country-folk still say that this *hâres* exists in the shape af an old black serpent which guards the house and bestows riches and good luck on the children born in that house.

It is held extremely unlucky to kill the old black serpent, as after its death great misfortunes will befall the members of the family.

GOOD LUCK

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[777] Many believe in their fortune or luck (especially maidens) according to the figures formed by melted lead.

On the Feast of St. John—24th of June—some lead is melted and immediately poured into a vessel containing

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water, and according to the figure or shape it assumes when it solidifies so will be the fortune of the person who tries the experiment. If the lead becomes bright the maiden is to get a handsome young man for her husband, and lead a happy life with him; if it turns out black the husband will be ugly and the maiden may expect to lead a miserable existence. (*) 787 823

THE BATH

On Easter Sunday as soon as the *Gloria* is sung in the Churches, mothers dip their babies into a bath, in which 755 824

(*) A similar practice is kept up in Denmark, where young women melt lead on New Year's Eve, and after pouring it into water observed in the following morning what form it has assumed. If it resembles a pair of scissors, they will inevitably marry tailors; if a hammer their husbands will be smiths, and so on. [171]

T. Dyer *Domestic Folklore.*

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THROWING STONES IN A WELL

Our ancestors made children believe that if they threw stones in a well or into the sea they had to lift them up some day with their eyelashes. 787 823

THIRTEEN AT TABLE

Sitting down thirteen to dinner is considered very unlucky. 777 264 763

The notion is that one of the thirteen will die within the next twenty four hours. The origin popularly assigned to this widespread superstition is the fact that thirteen was the number at the Last Supper, Judas being the thirteenth.

SNEEZING

The custom of saying "Evviva" or "Sahha" to one who happens to sneeze 827

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she honours and calls upon in her sister's hour of need. The tale is told of the birth-rose which was forgotten. Triplets were born. Later the rose was found, having grown on its withered stem three healthy branches bearing fresh, green leaves. Whatever deep significance attached originally to the birth-rose, the custom has a beauty of its own.

The next thought is for the little one's future. A gold ring or some other golden object is placed in the water in which he or she is washed, in order, they say, that riches will not be lacking. At one time, it may be, something of more value than the dross of riches was sought, for gold was the symbol of wisdom and a bright understanding long before it had value as currency.

It will be well if the baby is not red-headed, for the red-headed child will inevitably be known as "Son of the Wind," "Daughter of the alcove," or even more scurrilously, "Child of the priest." This readiness to doubt the paternity of poor little "Copper-knob" seems to indicate that, in spite of the blue or grey eyes of the peasants, the Maltese have always been an essentially brunette people. The slur may be no older than the occupation of the priestly knights, when celibacy must frequently have proved too much for the young "Aryans" of the Teutonic Langues. It may date back to the much earlier time of red-bearded Ullyses. It may, again, be nothing more than a rendering of "love-child"—for red has always been the colour of Love—sacred to Astoreth, Isis, and Venus.

Yet another of the Old Things has a hand in birth. Even to-day it is accounted by some a serious matter for a child to be born on Christmas Eve. Such a child is in danger of becoming a *Gaugau*—one whose spirit will leave its body every Christmas Eve—"They then go out and wander all over the island frightening people with their groanings. After thus performing these ghostly pranks for some hours,

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Maltese	*English*
"Red sky at evening, harness your mules. Red sky at morning, herd your beasts."	"Red sky at night, Shepherd's delight. Red sky in the morning Shepherd's warning."
"Ill weather comes, ahead or astern, when the cat sneezes."	"The cat washes herself before stormy weather."

Often it appears that sheer nonsense is mixed with sound common sense. Typical of the mixed "sense" and "nonsense" is the following:

"The first autumnal produce of the wild fig is called by the Maltese *Barru*. A second crop which takes place in winter is supposed to be due to the outcome of the first produce. This is called *Carru*, and is supposed to bring forth the third outcrop which appears in spring time and is recognized as the *dukkar* or real fertilizer of the fig. This fruit is cut and hung up in pairs on the bough of the fig tree.

"The male fruit (*dukkar*) is usually full of a colony of minute winged insects by the produce of which, the Maltese husbandman identifies the real fertilizing fruit.

"The pomegranate is supposed to be fertilized by the flowers of the wild parsnip, and for this purpose bunches of these flowers are thrown over the pomegranate tree when in flower. *Dakra*, probably from *dakar* = to fertilize, is the name given to the wild parsnip by the Maltese husbandman.

"The male flowers of the wild carob-tree (*baghal*) are thrown over the branches of the female plant to favour impregnation.

Small pieces of coarse stone are still hung up in the jujube-tree with a view to securing a good produce.

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241 823 [171] Husbandmen would still consider that queer operation as a medium of impregnation (*Dukkar*). This strange usage may, however, be traced amongst the *fellahin* of Upper Egypt, where, as Professor Sayce points out in his contribution to the *Cairene and Upper Egypt Folklore* (Folklore, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, 1920, p. 200) phallic symbols are still hung up to protect the melons and sugar-cane. The old Maltese practice of hanging up stones to the jujube-tree may therefore be considered as a modification of this early phallic worship."[1]

The sense contained in these practices requires no elucidation. The horticulturist with his camel hair brush does no better than the peasant with the male carob flowers. The votive stones are a silent appeal to the oldest and greatest of the Old Things, to the All-Father, Giver of Life and Fertility, whose ancient and enduring image, from Drizzlecombe in Devon to the High Places of Melanesia, is the Rock or Stone without shape—the altar of "The Unknown God"—"Thou art Peter and upon this Rock. . . ."

[538] Traces of this rock-cult are plentiful enough in Maltese folklore. Children who throw stones into a well or into the sea will one day have to gather them up by their eyelashes. The "old stones" (i.e. *menhir*) resent being moved and are, for that reason, twice as heavy as ordinary stones.

751 825 776 "St. Paul's tongue"—a valuable amulet against the evil-eye and against all venoms—takes the form of fossilized teeth found in the ancient rocks. The blessed tongue which preached the gospel of the Redeemer is enshrined for ever in rock, the symbol of the Father.

776 823 St. Paul's rock-cell, in which he is reputed to have lived, has the miraculous property that no matter how much of the rock is cut away its bulk grows no less—a clear expression

[1] Lecture by Mr. Cremona at the University of Malta in 1922.

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of the eternal and immutable nature of the All-Father whose symbol the rock is.

THE MONTHS

The Maltese, like the Scandinavians and the Russians, personify the months, giving to each a human character in keeping with its weather. A delightful little story called "The Gifts of the Months" serves the dual purpose of impressing the qualities of each month upon the listener, while stressing the importance of accepting the best qualities in every season without complaining about the disadvantages. Two brothers, one a poor peasant, the other a rich merchant, each meet the twelve months. On being questioned as to what people say about the months in his part of the country, the peasant recites a number of couplets in praise of each month:

> "'Friend,' said January, 'what do people say about January in your part of the world?'[1]
>
> The poor man answered, 'It is a month of rain and of plenty. Vegetables grow and all that your heart can desire.'
>
> 'Do you know any rhymes about it?' asked January.
>
> 'Just imagine asking!' cried the poor man. 'As many as ever you like.'
>
> 'Tell me some, please,' said January.
>
> The poor man then repeated the three following: 'January sits in the cosiest nook in the house. A warm January makes full barns in the summer. The January moon brings the girls out of the caves for they think it is daylight.'
>
> January smiled and the others laughed. Then February took up the running. 'Friend, what do they say about February?'

[1] GALEA AND MURRAY, op. cit.